



Innocent-looking factory

All bounds broken down

In the previous three sections of Chapter 10 of Capital, Volume 1, Karl Marx is concerned to show the unrestrained pressure for the *“unnatural extension of the working day”*.

“Capital cares nothing for the length of life of labour-power. All that concerns it is simply and solely the maximum of labour-power that can be rendered fluent in a working-day. It attains this end by shortening the extent of the labourer's life, as a greedy farmer snatches increased produce from the soil by robbing it of its fertility,” says Marx.

In a notable aside in **Section 5** on slavery, Marx remarks:

“once trading in slaves is practiced, become reasons for racking to the uttermost the toil of the slave; for, when his place can at once be supplied from foreign preserves, the duration of his life becomes a matter of less moment than its productiveness while it lasts. It is accordingly a maxim of slave management, in slave-importing countries, that the most effective economy is that which takes out of the human chattel in the shortest space of time the utmost amount of exertion it is capable of putting forth.”

Marx uses this remark on slavery to compare with capital, which he finds equally careless of life, and narrates how workers were terrorised into accepting these terrible conditions.

In **Section 6**, Marx records:

*“After capital had taken centuries in extending the working-day to its normal maximum limit, and then beyond this to the limit of the natural day of 12 hours, [98] there followed on the birth of machinism and modern industry in the last third of the 18th century, a violent encroachment like that of an avalanche in its intensity and extent. **All bounds of morals and nature, age and sex, day and night, were broken down.**”*

This is the Section that contains Marx’s account of the Chartists, some of whom he had befriended, and of their campaign for a Ten Hour Day.

At the beginning of **Section 7** Marx writes, in case we should forget:

“The reader will bear in mind that the production of surplus-value, or the extraction of surplus-labour, is the specific end and aim, the sum and substance, of capitalist production, quite apart from any changes in the mode of production, which may arise from the subordination of labour to capital.”

This section, two pages long, summarises the chapter on The Working Day, while also mentioning the US agitation for the 8 Hour Day, and the support it got from the International Working Men’s Association (the First International) of which Marx had been the founding Secretary.

The Working Day is a readable, prose chapter. Anyone can understand it.

Image: Johnson and Johnson factory, USA, 1886

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Capital V1, Chapter 10, The Working Day, parts 5 to 7.](#)
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